Direct Care Leads Job Growth in New York State

Comprising almost 530,000 personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants, the direct care workforce is New York State’s largest workforce—and it is growing quickly. Direct care will add far more new jobs than any other occupation in the state within the decade, and will also see the most total job openings (including new jobs plus vacancies caused by workers moving into other occupations or leaving the labor force).

Who Are New York’s Direct Care Workers?

Direct care workers provide essential daily supports that enable older adults and people with disabilities to thrive and help family caregivers continue working. In New York, the typical direct care worker is a woman of color, and many workers are immigrants to the United States.

NEW YORK STATE’S DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE BY THE NUMBERS:

- Female: 91%
- People of Color: 77%
- High School Diploma or Less: 61%
- Immigrants: 60%
- Median Age: 47
Direct Care Workers Struggle to Earn a Living

Despite their important contributions to long-term care and the broader economy, economic self-sufficiency remains an elusive goal for many direct care workers. Median annual earnings for these workers in New York State are only $21,100. Meanwhile, a single adult without children needs over $32,300 to cover the cost of living in the state and a single adult with two children needs more than $85,200, according to MIT’s Living Wage Calculator. As a result of low wages and annual earnings, 45 percent of the state’s direct care workers live in or near poverty (below 200 percent of the federal poverty level) and 51 percent rely on public assistance.

LOOKING ACROSS NEW YORK STATE

Understanding regional differences helps in developing tailored workforce development strategies and policy solutions. Here’s a snapshot of New York’s direct care workforce across regions by size and median wages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Direct Care Workers</th>
<th>Median Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>18,020</td>
<td>$14.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central New York</td>
<td>11,410</td>
<td>$13.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger Lakes</td>
<td>22,030</td>
<td>$13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson Valley</td>
<td>44,140</td>
<td>$15.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Island</td>
<td>57,570</td>
<td>$16.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohawk Valley</td>
<td>13,510</td>
<td>$13.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>323,180</td>
<td>$15.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Country</td>
<td>7,210</td>
<td>$14.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Tier</td>
<td>8,780</td>
<td>$13.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western New York</td>
<td>22,230</td>
<td>$13.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Direct Care Worker Job Openings by Occupation, 2018–2028

Home Care Workforce Challenges Are Acute

Nearly 88 percent of job openings in New York State will be in home care, including home health aide and personal care aide jobs. But these workers face particular challenges. Median annual earnings for home care workers are only $19,200, over $10,000 less than annual earnings for nursing assistants in nursing homes—and 57 percent of home care workers rely upon public benefits, compared to 35 percent of nursing assistants. Without improving the quality of home care jobs, New York State will struggle to fill projected job openings and meet the growing demand for home care.

Stakeholders Must Take Action

All stakeholders—including policymakers, community-based organizations, employers, workforce development organizations, payers, and others—must take action to improve job quality and ensure that New Yorkers have access to high-quality long-term care services across settings.

We must invest in our direct care workers by:

- Enhancing the quality of entry-level and ongoing training;
- Improving direct care workers’ schedules and compensation;
- Developing career pathways for direct care workers;
- Incorporating supports that enable workers to be successful in their jobs;
- Establishing robust workforce data collection systems;
- Building cultural and linguistic competence into all aspects of long-term care; and
- Exploring other innovative ways to invest in and support workers.

To learn more about New York City’s direct care workforce and PHI, contact PHI State Policy Manager Allison Cook at ACook@PHInational.org

Updated October 2020